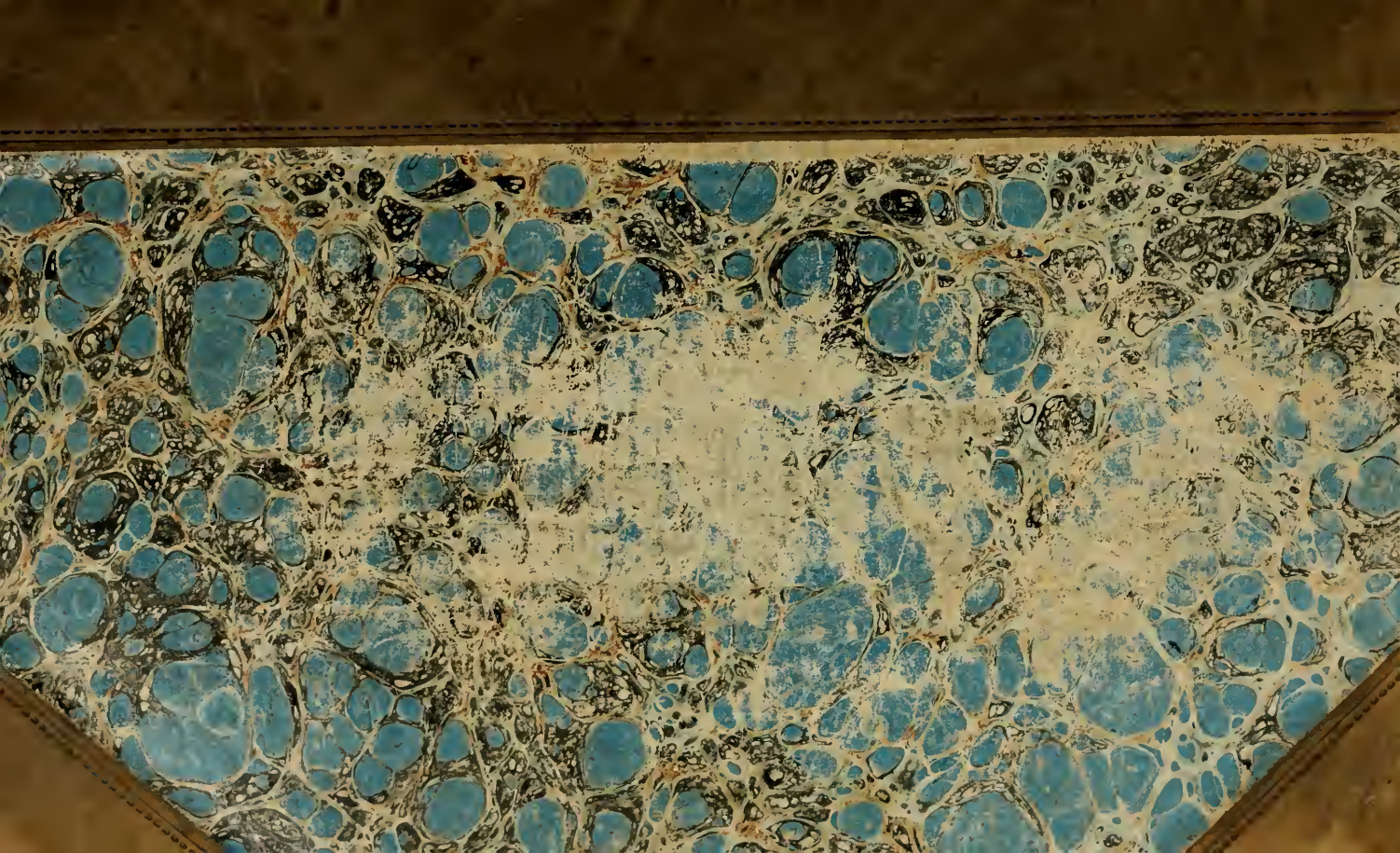

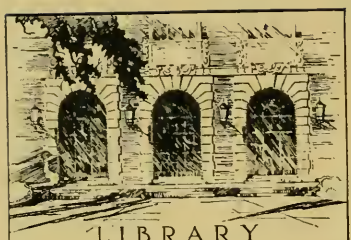

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THE CHURCH'S FEAR AND THE CHURCH'S HOPE.

THE CHURCH'S FEAR AND THE CHURCH'S HOPE.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF WELLS,

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BATH AND WELLS DIOCESAN SOCIETIES, ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER, 4th, 1864.

BY W. C. MAGEE, D.D.,

Dean of Cork.

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MDCCCLXIV.

SERMON.

Acts xxviii. 15.

"Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage."

These words are few and simple. The fact which they relate does not seem at first sight a very striking or important one. They tell us how St. Paul in his first journey to Rome was comforted and cheered on his landing in Italy, by finding that brethren from Rome had come so far to meet him on his way. This account of their meeting seems interesting and even touching, but nothing more.

And yet these words are of inestimable value. We could better afford to lose nearly the whole of the rest of this story of the voyage of St. Paul than this account of his meeting with his brethren. For while the rest of the story tells us what St. Paul did, or what happened to him, this tells us what he thought and felt. In all the rest of the voyage we see the outer life of St. Paul; here we see his inner life, the very man himself. We have here revealed to us the very innermost heart of a great man, in a great crisis of a great life. And we have him revealed to us in quite a new and unexpected light.

Up to the moment of this meeting, the one characteristic of St. Paul, perhaps, that strikes us most through all this voyage, is his utter fearlessness. From the hour when he first sets his face towards Jerusalem, to the hour of his landing in Italy, he seems not to know what fear is. The

bonds and imprisonment that he knew awaited him; the bitter partings with his dearest friends, their tears and their entreaties that break his heart, but cannot break his purpose; the fierce mobs of Jerusalem; the cool deadly hatred of his enemies, their desperate conspiracies their cunning accusations; his long, weary imprisonments, his vain pleadings for liberty; the perils of the deep, the horrors of shipwreck—none of these things seem to move him. They seem all alike powerless against the calm resolute will, the lofty courage of this fearless man.

And, indeed, so remarkable is this fearlessness that it seems to us supernatural. We account for it by the fact that St. Paul through all these dangers enjoyed a special and miraculous support. We think of him as the man of visions and of revelations, assured by angel messengers of his safety from the first. And, as we so look upon him, he seems removed far above the reach of our sympathies. We do not think of encouraging or comforting ourselves by his example in our hour of trial or danger. We feel that though his danger might be our danger, yet that his strength could never be our strength, nor his triumph our triumph. In a word, it is the apostle we wonder at and envy; it is not the man that we sympathise with and love.

But as we read these few words, all our feelings are changed. For they tell us that this man, who seemed so fearless, had all along been sore afraid. Paul "thanks God, and takes courage." Up to this moment, then, he has feared. The shadow of some great dread has rested on his soul. He seems, as it were, to draw a long sigh of relief as it passes away, and thanks God that it is gone at last; and now for the first time, in the utterance of his thanks for its departure, we learn how dark and how heavy it was, and how long he bore it.

And as we see him thus, we regain at once all our sympathy with him. He comes very near to us again as we discover that all his miraculous gifts and helps did not lift him above the level of our own human

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life, with its fears and its anxieties. And as we think of him, haunted by these fears, burdened with these anxieties, and yet hiding them in his secret heart—wearing for friend or foe the same undaunted front, cheering with words of lofty faith the weak souls around him—then it is no longer the great apostle that we wonder at, it is the man with whom we sympathise. The man of like passions with ourselves, tried by the same trials, stirred by the same fears, assailed by the same temptations, sustained by the same sufficient grace, that we, in our turn, may know. And as we see him, thus tried, and thus supported, we thank God for the sight. All who, like him, are called to do or to suffer God's holy will; all who, like him, are called on to brave danger or endure temptation in the Christian course; all who, in the voyage of life, know what it is to go down into its deep waters, aye, and be wrecked in its great tempests; all, these—and they are all who are striving to live for God and with Christ in this world—when they see these footsteps deep-printed on the sands of time, may "thank God, and take courage."

And, specially, brethren, those may do so, who specially inherit St. Paul's mission,—those who are his successors in the ministry of the Word, and who know, as he knew, though in far lesser measure, the cares and anxieties, the fears and discouragements, the toils and the disappointments of that ministry;—we and all our lay brethren, too, who in any way are working together with us for God, may learn lessons of guidance and of encouragement from these words. We may learn, too, lessons of warning. In our hour of carelessness we may learn to fear, as St. Paul feared, and in our hour of despondency we may learn, like him, to "thank God, and take courage." Let us then endeavour to understand what were the fears, and what the encouragements of this great Christian missionary and pastor, Paul.

Let us see, in the first place, what it was that St. Paul feared. We can see at once what it was he did *not* fear. He

did not fear bonds or death; not because these had no terrors for him—they had—but, because it is clear that this could not have been the fear from which the meeting with his brethren delivered him. For this simple reason, that they could have saved him from neither. These few Christian brethren or the whole Christian Church at Rome, could have given him no protection against the power of the Roman Empire. It must then have been something else that he feared. And what this was, we learn from a passage in one of his letters, in which he asks his brethren to pray that utterance might be given him, that he might "open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel for which he was an ambassador in bonds." [1]

What St. Paul feared was, lest the terrors of the imperial judgment seat should so awe him that he should fail to speak boldly, as he ought; lest he should prove unfaithful to his great mission. His fear was not *for* himself, but *of* himself. He was afraid of being afraid, of not being equal to the great crisis of his life, of stammering and faltering when he came to speak to Cæsar the message of Cæsar's Master.

And, naturally, this fear must have grown stronger the nearer he drew to Rome. For at every step in that journey fresh proof must have met him of the might of that great empire whose faith he was about to assail. The great world-power, whose shadow had rested on his own distant home in Palestine, and filled him from his youth with a sense of its vastness, was rising up before him hour after hour, as he neared it, grander and more terrible. He sees the huge iron image in all its colossal proportions, stately and stern, the feet, part iron and part clay, yet hidden from his view, scarce smitten yet by the great stone that is one day to crumble it into dust, and fill its place in the earth!

And as he thinks how it is the faith that is allied with all this power, the church of this great state that he is to try to overthrow; as he thinks of preaching to the law-givers of the world the name of a convict sentenced by their law and

[1] Eph. vi 19.

executed by their soldiers, as he thinks of proclaiming to the sneering philosophers, and licentious nobles, and crafty priests and cruel populace of Rome, the story of the crucified Galilean, well might his heart fail him; well might he be tempted to feel for one moment ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, and doubt if here, too, it would prove to be "the power of God."

But if these were Paul's fears and Paul's temptations, is it possible they can be ours now? Are not all the circumstances of the case exactly reversed? Is not all the power and progress of the world now on the side of Christianity? Is it not a civilised and learned Christendom that now rules the world, and confronts and beats back a barbarous and decaying Paganism? What is there, then, in the position of Christianity in the world, what is there in the position, above all, of Christ's ministers in the Church of the mightiest empire the world ever saw — the empire of Christian England—that should make us fear for the Gospel, or ashamed to preach it?

And yet, when we look more closely into the condition of Christendom at this moment, when we see how small a portion of the world it has conquered in the eighteen hundred years of its history, when we remember that nearly one third of the human race professes a virtual atheism and one half is still pagan, when we remember that our own realm of England numbers more heathen than Christian subjects, when we look within the limits of this Christendom, and see in how large a portion of it the Christian faith is corrupted with some of the worst errors of the paganism which Paul encountered at Rome; when we see all over the continent of Europe the educated mind revolting against this degraded Christianity, and see in ominous opposition, piety and intellect, religion and progress; when we find the same startling fact within the limits of our own purer form of Christianity; when we hear our men of science and of learning openly proclaiming that the science and learning of the age has proved our Revelation a forgery

and our Faith a superstition; when we hear—more terrible still—their cry re-echoed from within the walls of our very sanctuary, and see priests of the Lord not gathering around to save the ark of our faith, but putting forth unhallowed hands to break it into fragments:—as we see and hear all this, does there never come over us a feeling of utter weariness and dismay—a feeling how great, how terrible is the empire of evil in the world, how small, how weak the kingdom of Christ? Oh! brethren, surely there is no earnest thinker amongst us who has not felt this, who has not said, again and again, as he looks on Christendom at large, "The overflowings of ungodliness make me afraid, the might of the world's power appals me." What worker for God has not felt tempted to ask, "Is this gospel, after all, the great power of God—the greatest power of God? Is there no better, no purer, no higher revelation in store for men? Can there be truth in the great and swelling words of our new apostles? Is there some better thing for us in these days? Is it not time to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ?" Whoever has felt this, has felt the fear, and known the temptation, of St. Paul.

And now let us see what were St. Paul's encouragements against his fear. When he sees his brethren, "he thanks God, and takes courage!" What did he see in these few Roman Christians to give him such courage?

He saw, of course, a proof of the progress of Christianity where he came to preach it. He was reminded of the fact that in Rome there was already a Christian church, and he might naturally be encouraged, as any teacher of a new sect would be, at meeting with fellow believers. But this was not all. Paul saw in these brethren something more than a proof that his sect was spreading. He saw a sure and certain proof that it should not only spread but conquer. He saw in these few Christian men a sure and certain pledge of the final triumph of Christianity. For he saw in them a most sure and certain proof

that the Gospel of Christ was "the power of God." They gave him evidence, as clear as any voice from heaven or sign on earth that he had ever seen or wrought, that God was on his side against the world. For in these Christian converts he beheld that which distinguishes the true convert to Christianity from the converts to any other faith the world has ever known. He saw not merely men whose opinions had been changed by reason, but men whose natures had been changed by grace. On these men had been wrought a real miracle, the greatest of all miracles, the miracle of regeneration. There was manifest in them that great interruption to the course of nature, that mightiest of all interferences of omnipotence with the fixed order of creation, by which man becomes a new creature, begotten, "not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," that great supernatural fact which proves the Church of Christ to be a supernatural kingdom, whose laws and whose powers are not of this world, but are instinct with a divine energy and might.

This is that miracle of which Christ prophesied, when He told an unbelieving world that he that believed on Him should do mightier works than His, that they might marvel. This is that miracle which He promised should never cease in His Church, when He said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." And when Paul beheld once more this token of his Lord's presence in His kingdom, when he heard, as it were, by the lips of these his brethren, his Master's message,—"Fear not, O thou of little faith, I am with thee still;" surely the vision of the great kingdom of his Lord must have come back upon his soul, seen, not as he saw it then in the persons of those few Christian brethren; seen, not as it is ever seen on earth, in fragmentary and imperfect portions here and there, but as he saw it in the highest moments of his inspiration, when caught away by the Spirit into the very heaven of heavens, he saw the city of the living God in all its glory and its beauty, with its innumerable company of angels and spirits of just men

made perfect, its assembly and Church of the first-born; the kingdom of God amongst men, with all its mighty powers, effectual to the pulling down of all strongholds of error or of vice, its mysterious unquenchable life, deep hid with Christ in God, its all-sufficing all-sustaining grace, its present peace that passeth all understanding, its glorious and assured future which passeth all conception. Surely, in this hour of returning faith and hope, the might and the glory of the Invisible came up before him to deliver him from the power of the visible. He was no longer Paul the prisoner, Paul the preacher of a new and despised gospel; but Paul the apostle and servant of Christ, the messenger and prophet of the most high God, Paul the forerunner and the herald of that great kingdom which, so sure as Christ lived and God ruled on earth, should one day conquer the whole world, and make it once more the kingdom and the Paradise of God! And as this vision of the kingdom rose before him, he "thanked God and took courage."

And we, brethren, have we not the same evidence, the same encouragement that Paul had? Assuredly we have. Christ has not left His later church without evidence of his presence as clear as that He gave His earlier church. We are not resting our faith merely on the historic tradition, however certain, that God wrought miracles as an evidence of Christianity; we rest it on the fact that He is amongst us working them still. The spiritual man, renewed by the Spirit of God, is the standing miracle of the Christian Church which links the otherwise unmiraculous present with the marvellous and miraculous past;—the miracle, the greater, higher miracle, which was designed to supersede, by its clearer evidence, the necessity of repeating physical signs and wonders; evidence, which was designed to have grown ever clearer and clearer, as the grain of mustard seed grew into the great tree that should overshadow the earth, its own growth, its own heavenly fruit, its best evidence, no longer needing that fence of physical miracle that once protected its weaker infancy.

And it is this miracle, too, which explains and justifies all the others, which rescues them from that low use of them which makes them merely proofs of doctrine—physical arguments addressed by God to men's senses, though these they were—which shews them to be something more and better than this, not proofs merely, but signs, significant acts, supernatural tokens that a supernatural kingdom was come among men, marvellous beginnings of that yet more marvellous future, which they heralded—the life on earth of the kingdom of heaven, miraculous stirrings of the pool of the world's faith, which only prepared for the mightier miracle to be wrought on those, who, stepping down, are healed of whatsoever disease they have.

Yes, brethren, God has given us in this ever-present miracle, an ever-present answer to the assailants of our faith. What is the last great discovery of scientific unbelief? It is that the supernatural is impossible. The uniformity of nature's laws, we are told, admits of no disturbance, and therefore, whatever of miraculous our Christian history alleges cannot be truth, for miracles cannot be.

Our answer is, miracles are, not were long ago, but are now. Our testimony concerning them is that of eye witnesses. "We speak that we do know; we testify that we have seen." You men of science tell us that you have learned to reject all legends of the supernatural, because they are irreconcilable with the laws of the natural world, as deduced by you from present facts. We invite you, then, to the consideration of certain present facts, which we allege to be supernatural. We are content, since you insist upon it, to lay aside our books which tell us only of the past, and we call you to come out with us into the world of to-day. We ask you to accompany, in his round of daily duty, the parson whom you despise for his superstitious belief in stories of marvels eighteen hundred years old, and see if you can account for certain marvels that he has to shew you. You will see men of vice and men of crime—men on whom society has done its worst, and for whom it has done, or

tried to do, in vain, its best—its outcasts, or its victims, hopeless, hardened, desperate. You will see these men arrested in their course of self-destruction, humanised, civilized, reformed, sanctified. You will see drunkards made sober, harlots chaste, profligates pure, thieves honest, misers liberal, selfish pleasure-hunters loving and self-denying. You will see men, women and children—not made of finer clay than their fellows, not of stronger will, or higher mental endowments, not in any way *naturally* superior to those about them—doing what those others confess they cannot do; daring what they cannot dare, suffering what they say they could not suffer; passing unhurt through fires of temptation where others are consumed; bearing, without murmur, burdens of affliction beneath which others sink; compelling the admiration and the wonder even of those who walk not as they walk, but who cannot help seeing that round their daily path is shed a light which is not of this world. Such sights, believe us, are to be seen—not many, perhaps, in one place, for miracles alas! are rare, but many such, taken altogether, throughout this realm of England, in this modern matter-of-fact every day world of ours, are to be seen. And they are strange sights. They do not seem altogether natural, not quite in the ordinary course of events, which seems to run all the other way; not, perhaps, accountable for on any known principles of political economy; not, perhaps, easily reducible under the law of natural selection or of natural development, by which brutes become men, but by which men do not become saints.

But you have not seen all. We ask you who insist so strongly on the uniformity and universality of the laws which govern natural phenomena, to mark in these phenomena we shew you, the presence of a law equally uniform and equally universal with those you worship. Ask those who have been the subjects of this great change, what it is has changed them. Ask those who are living lives so strangely different from other men, what is the power by which they live; and they will, one and all, give you the same answer. They will

all tell you of a supernatural power—of a Spirit within them working in their spirit, warring against their natural lusts and affections—forbidding them to do what nature often prompts them to do, enabling them to do what seems too hard for mere natural flesh and blood, to do—a law in their mind and in their members bringing them into captivity to a higher and a nobler will than theirs—a captivity which they feel to be the truest and the dearest freedom.

More than this. They tell you, one and all, in every part of the world, in every language under heaven, yet with one voice, that they owe this change to a person—that it is a real living personal will that is ruling them. They tell you that the new nature they feel within them is the gift of One who promised that he would dwell in them; that they are striving, by the help of his Spirit, to live, however imperfectly, that heavenly life which he lived perfectly. They tell you that the best and highest moments in their lives are those when they are most in communion with Him; that their holiest thoughts, their wisest words, their noblest deeds, are those in which they best succeed in imitating him. They tell you that weak and sinful as they are by nature, in Him they still find a supernatural might, and that they "can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth them."

And yet more than this. It is not these only who give this answer, but all who have ever lived as they live declare that the gospel of Christ has been the great power of God to their salvation. Through all the past; from the hour when this person first appeared on earth; from prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors; from disciples of all times and of all regions, high and low, old and young, rich and poor; from all alike comes still the same utterance, "Not unto us, not unto us, but to Our Lord, to our Saviour, to Him who lived and died and rose again for us, to Him who washed us from our sins in His blood, to Him be praise and glory and honor, for ever and for ever!"

And now we ask the scientific rejecter and despiser of the

supernatural to explain these facts. Account for them, produce them, by any means, physical, moral, social, at your command, find a place for them in your classes of natural phenomena, fit them into some scientific and rational hypothesis. And if you cannot, if you are obliged to admit that there are facts for which you can find no adequate cause, do not too hastily, do not too scornfully, refuse to listen to our explanation. Hear us at least patiently, nay, hear us respectfully, when we tell you that this is a supernatural fact, this is a miracle, this is that greatest of all miracles, the spirit of man wrought on by the Spirit of God.

And now in the presence of this great fact we are entitled to draw from it our arguments, and our deductions, as you do from the facts of nature. You tell us that the uniform character of the facts with which you are conversant force you to believe miracles impossible. We tell you that the uniform character of the facts we are conversant with, force us to believe miracles necessary. You deduce from your facts the natural laws of the kingdom of nature; we deduce from our facts, the supernatural laws of the Kingdom of Grace. Our facts, and our laws, are as much entitled to respect as yours. And we tell you further that you are unreasonable, unscientific, in your treatment of the facts we shew you. You refuse to take them into account. When you say miracles are impossible, you exclude from the facts of your induction a large class of facts entitled to your respectful attention. If you weighed them, you might discover something mightier in the world than its laws—the will of its law-giver; something deeper than its phenomena—the Spirit of its Maker.

But it seems you have another difficulty in the way of your accepting our explanation of these facts. The Book which we say accounts for them, and which we say, alone pretends to account for them—the Book which reveals to us the laws which produce and govern the facts of the supernatural world, you say, contradicts in some places certain truths which science has revealed to you concerning the facts of the material

world. Its account of the creation will not harmonize with Geology; its history of man will not fit into modern chronology; its descriptions of natural phenomena are not scientifically correct; and you require us to harmonize all these contradictions before you accept our religion. But why should we alone be called on to effect this reconciliation? Does it not, after all, concern you as much as it does us to attempt it? Nay, does it not concern you far more than it does us? For this contradiction which you allege to exist between Scripture and science in no way touches those supernatural and spiritual facts which we have been insisting upon. Regeneration, conversion, sanctification, by the Spirit of God through faith in Christ Jesus, are facts, whether Scripture does or does not agree in every respect with science. Geology does not contradict the mystery of regeneration. Ethnology has nothing to say against the miracle of men's conversion.

Our facts remain untouched by yours. And it far more concerns you to know whether our theory of these be true, than it does us to know whether your theories concerning yours are true. If you demand that we respect your facts, we ask that you acknowledge ours. If you would smile at us if we inferred from the facts of religion the falsehood of science, may we not smile at you who infer from the facts of science the falsehood of religion?

Surely, if all you say of contradictions between Scripture and science were absolutely certain; if we are bound to accept as infallible the last of the many contradicting and changing interpretations of nature which science has given us; and if this really contradicts our last interpretation of some passage in an inspired writer; all that would result from this would be, that we should be compelled to modify that theory as to the nature of inspiration, which asserts that it necessarily preserved inspired men from all errors in matters of science. But this would leave the great facts of Christianity, and the interpretation of those facts in Scripture just where they were before. And it would leave

the man of science just as much bound as ever to investigate these facts for his very life's sake; for if these be facts, his eternal life depends upon his understanding and accepting them. Why, then, should we be always called upon to leave this vantage ground of spiritual and supernatural fact on which we stand, to make our way to that lower height on which stand the disciples of science? "Our rock is higher than their rock." A brighter dawn, an earlier day is ours. The light that gilds the summit of the highest mountain-peak of knowledge is light indeed from heaven; but all around us shines the glory of the Lord of Heaven, the light of that city that needs neither the sun by day, nor the moon by night to lighten it, for the Lamb is the light thereof. We hear, nay, we see that far below, in the valley, as it were, where the base of these two mountains join, in the lower level where Scripture and science meet, rise fogs of doubt and mists of difficulty here and there. It does not greatly trouble us for our sakes. Our feet are in a large place. The air we breathe is free and clear. But for our brethren's sake, who stand below us, we would they were rolled away, and for their sakes, not for ours, we entreat them to fight their way through these low-lying mists and fogs, and press still upwards and onwards till they reach to us.

Let us not, then, be too feverishly anxious for immediate reconcilements of science and Scripture. They will come in God's good time and way, as other reconcilements have come in times past; come, perhaps, when men seek them, on the one hand, less nervously; on the other, more earnestly; come, when men of science own that it concerns them to be religious, far more than it concerns men of faith to be scientific; come, when men of science lose their impatient intolerance of Revelation, and men of faith their impatient intolerance of science; come, when both alike only seek honestly for truth, and not for victory; come, when God sees his Church sufficiently tried and purified by the assault upon her faith, through which she is now passing.

Meanwhile, we need not stay for one instant our work

for God on account of these unreconciled differences. Nay, the very knowledge of their existence is all the stronger reason why we should be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." The more the authority of Scripture is denied or its other evidences impugned, the more does it behove us to strengthen that one kind of evidence which alone admits of being strengthened or increased by us. For the facts of religion are not like the facts of science, which exist, independent of our care or our neglect. They, on the contrary, can be increased or diminished by us. Science in her hours of inaction sleeps. Religion, in her hour of inaction, dies. Here, then, is the quarter in which to look for the real danger and the real strength of the Church. The question is not, what are the numbers or what the strength of her assailants from without, but what is the strength of the spiritual life within her pale. The question is not what manner of men are sitting in the judgment-seat of critical or scientific unbelief, before which her ministers are called to plead, but what manner of men are those brethren who still recognise her ministers as messengers of God. What is the Christianity of our day? Is it still a living power among men? Is the Church of Christ still fertile in saints as of old? Are the truths of our creeds still living principles, by which Christians live and for which they would be content to die? Are Christians seen and felt to be men walking by a higher law, sustained by a loftier principle, truer, braver, purer, holier men than those avowedly of this world? Are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," to be seen within the pale of the Church as they are not to be seen without it? If so, let us "thank God, and take courage." Christ is in the midst of her still—no weapon formed against her shall prosper.

But if not; if our religion is becoming less and less a reality, and more and more a form; if our creeds are only a collection of notions, about which men are willing to wrangle but by which they do not care to live; if Christian

lives never rise beyond the level of morality that society demands from all its members; if the Church of Christ has ceased to produce saints, and can only shew respectable men; if Christians are seen and felt to be less zealous, less devoted, less truly spiritual than those of old; if faith is waning and love waxing cold;—then, indeed, may we tremble for the Church of Christ in this land. For then we may fear that the time is near at hand, when the salt which has lost its savour shall be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Then we may fear, nay, rather most certainly expect that men will rise up, with one accord, to sweep from their path, to bury out of their sight that most odious and pestilential of all things that rot between earth and heaven, the corpse of a dead religion. Let those who fear or those who hope for the Church in these days, ask themselves each this question. Not what are men writing or saying for or against Christianity, but what are we christian men doing for or against it, each in his own daily life; what evidence are we giving each of us in our parishes, in our families, in society, that the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation? What reason would our brethren have as they meet us in the course of life, strengthened by our faith, uplifted by our example, to "thank God and take courage?"

This is a solemn question; God give us grace to ask it solemnly and often; God give us grace to find a happy and a hopeful answer.

But, in the next place, St. Paul was cheered by the sympathy of these brethren. He felt, as he met them, that whatever trial or danger he should have to encounter, they would stand by him, feel for him, pray for him, speak to him words of comfort and good cheer. Though they could not deliver him from the hour that awaited him, they could deliver him from the severest trial of that hour—the encountering it alone. His affectionate nature yearned for sympathy. How he longed for it, how he suffered from the want of it we know from his touching complaint of

these very brethren, when he tells us how, at his first trial, no man stood by him.

"Woe to him that is alone when he falleth." Alas, for him who is called, even to stand, however bravely, alone. It is a trial almost too great for the bravest heart. It was the thought that he was left alone in Israel that drove the prophet Elijah to cry out for death; it was the revelation that he had still brethren in the faith that restored him to life again. It was the loneliness of His hour of darkness that made it seem most terrible to Him who foretold how the sheep should be scattered every one to his own, and should leave him alone; it was the yearning of the human heart for human sympathy that led Him in that hour to ask the presence of the three disciples. And as if He remembered the loneliness of that hour, as if He knew how, ever in their hours of trial or temptation, the sorest need of His followers would be the sympathy of their brethren, as if He knew how weak each one of us is alone, how strong in his union with his brethren, he has made ample provision that our religious life shall not be a solitary one. He has willed that from first to last we shall find ourselves members of a brotherhood, fellow-soldiers in one army, pilgrims together in one helpful loving band, bearing one another's burdens, sharing one another's sorrows, strengthening one another's infirmities. He has made it our privilege to bear to the weak or suffering brother a message of love from the common Father, a token by the hands of his more hopeful, stronger brethren, that he is not forgotten nor forsaken, that the Father who is chastening him, is chastening him in love, that the elder brother who has passed into the heavens, is very near him still, and, touched with a feeling of his infirmities, has made this provision for them in the sympathy of his brethren on earth. And as thus, in life's journey, brother meets brother, as we realise our membership in the great family in heaven and earth, and remember that it joins us not only to each other, but to Christ and to God, we "thank God and take courage."

But it is not only for our encouragement that our Lord has given us this fellowship; it is for our growth in grace. "It is not good for man to be alone." He who said this knew that for man to be alone was not only to be unhappy, but to be imperfect. All that is best and noblest in human nature, can only exist, can only be conceived of in man as a social being. It is society, with all its manifold relations and duties, that educates and developes man. Without this, progress is impossible. The man who lives apart from his fellows becomes imperfect, deformed, dwarfed in all his moral and intellectual life, a mere fragment of a man. And, in like manner, nations which have isolated themselves from the rest of the world, have never advanced beyond a certain point in civilisation; they remain still childish, undeveloped, imperfect.

So is it in the highest of all forms of life and in the noblest of all kingdoms. Brotherhood is essential to the perfection of its members. The isolated Christian can never reach to the full stature of the perfect man. So surely as the Christian separates himself from his brethren and makes his religious life a solitary and a selfish one, so surely does he stunt and dwarf his spiritual life. And so it is with the party or sect that isolates itself. It must ever remain stunted, feeble, undeveloped, or else develop itself into some diseased and monstrous growth.

And, therefore, our loving Lord has not merely appointed for us this brotherhood, as a privilege; he has made it a necessity. He has forbidden us to separate ourselves from one another. Even in our most secret prayer He has bid us say, not my Father, but "Our Father." He has given the promise of his special presence, not to one alone but to two or three gathered together in his name. He has made the highest act—spiritual communion with Him—an act in which those who together partake of His body and His blood, being many, are made one. And as the brotherhood of the Church of Christ is the highest form of human life, so it is the closest form of union. It is something more

than the unity of an association or a nation or a family. It is an organised unity, the unity of a living body. It is that kind of union in which every part is necessary to every other, wherein if one member suffer all must suffer with it, not merely by sympathy but by defect, wherein the union of all is essential to the life of each and to the growth and health of the whole.

In this direction lie two great dangers of the Christian Church, which ever threaten its unity. Of these, one is only good in excess; the other is unmixed evil. They are individualism and party spirit.

Individualism is the exaggeration of the personal element in religion. True religion must ever be deeply, truly personal. Its very core must ever be the individual soul in its personal relation to God in Christ. It is a most precious truth, the truth which the Reformation restored to the Church, that between the soul and its Saviour none may intervene. There are moments when this truth is fully realized. There are times in the history of every spiritual man, when all his thoughts centre on the great question of his soul's life or death, and when he is only conscious of the existence of two beings, himself and God. But there is a danger of remaining, of resting in such a state—a danger of forgetting that our personal union with the head is meant to unite us also with the members, and that the communion of the visible Church of Christ is God's appointed means of strengthening and perfecting the life of each individual Christian. And this is a danger to which the Churches of the Reformation are especially exposed. For the very earnestness and completeness of their protest against the Romish exaggeration of the truth of the corporate life of the Church, tends to an exaggeration of the opposite truth of the personal life of the individual.

But the danger to the Church from individualism is as nothing to that arising from party spirit. From the days of St. Paul until now, the spirit of schism has been the canker and the curse of the Church. That evil spirit of separation which gathers men in separate and hostile bands, each round

its own miserable banner, on which some wretched party device replaces the one sign which, lifted up, should draw all men together;—the spirit which leads men to substitute their shibboleths for the creeds of the Church, their leaders for the Church's Head, their party sympathies and attachments for the communion of the saints.

What fear, what hope have we, then, in this matter, for our Church? Cause for fear there has been, and there is still. Fear, that in the awakening earnestness and life of the Church in our day, minds intent on personal religion should overlook the great fact that there is such a thing as a visible Church of Christ, and that it is by membership and fellowship in this Church their personal religion is to be perfected. Danger, great danger in the strife of parties of the last thirty years. The Church has, in that time, more than once been all but torn asunder. The robe of Christ, which was spared by his enemies has, in our day, been all but rent by His followers. But there is hope, too, for our Church; hope in the very earnestness that has caused this stir and strife; hope in the awakening and the life of the dry bones, that with confusion and collision are coming together, clashing, yet uniting still, till at last they make one great army; hope in the fact that party distinctions and party asperities are softening, that Churchmen at last are rather seeking to discover wherein they agree than wherein they differ; hope in the thought that the assaults on our common faith are bringing the faithful nearer to each other. As the foe assails our walls, we discover that one wall girds us all, one citadel of faith unites us all. Those who were once regarded as enemies are recognised as fellow soldiers and saints, and of the household of God; and as we see this, we "thank God, and take courage."

Lastly. St. Paul was cheered by the hope of Christian co-operation. These Roman christians would be his fellow-labourers in the gospel. The word of God would not be imprisoned with him. They would spread the gospel through a thousand channels he could never reach. There is no need

to dwell upon the encouragement this must have given Paul, nor on the encouragement it must give to any one who like Paul is working earnestly for God. There is no such worker who does not desire this help; no one who hears me who may not give it. But such co-operation brings us more than comfort—it brings us special grace. If the spirit of love and unity be the life-blood of the Church, the spirit of active zeal is the toil and exercise that sends that blood through all its limbs with stronger pulse and warmer flow. What can draw men closer together than work? What can wear away the angles of party distinctions like the friction of daily active energy? Differences that seem insurmountable in the study vanish in the street. In the presence of the great evils and sins and sorrows of the world around us, smaller questions dwindle into nothing. Men who are wrestling with these have scarce time to stop to wrangle. From co-operation, too, we gain the grace of all others most needed—humility. He who works alone for God is apt to grow puffed up, to look with satisfaction and pride on his little plot in the vineyard where he has borne the burden and heat of the day, and thinks how great his work has been and how large should be his reward. But he who calls many labourers round him is soon taught that God's work is not to be done by one man. He learns how much of it there is that he was never intended to do, and how much others are better fitted for. He is made to see how God will prefer some utterly despised and inferior instrumentality to his own—some brother of less gifts, but greater grace. He is taught patience, self-denial, willingness to see other men enter into his labours and reap where he sowed or gather a full harvest where he toiled in vain. All this is good for us proud, jealous, impatient mortals; good that we should be taught how great is God's work—how vast is His plan—how blessed our privilege in being allowed to work in it at all.

And if co-operation in Christian activity for God be thus healthful and blessed, surely here is a bright spot in our

Church's history. Surely if one feature of Church life is more marked than another in our day, it is the greatly increased amount of Christian co-operation for God. How many new Church societies have been originated in the last fifty years—what life and earnestness infused into older ones, what earnest active real work we see around us. Of course this has its dangers too—danger of fussy noisy activity rather than of steady quiet work—danger of self-glorification—danger of neglect of the inner life. But, in spite of all this, here is an evidence of life and zeal for which we "thank God, and take courage."

And if active co-operation be thus the very life of the Church, how manifestly is Divine providence favouring in our day the development of it. Has not the whole progress of art and of science of late years tended to facilitate communion amongst men, to bring them together in the most marvellous way? How near all parts of the world seem to us! How rapidly each wave of thought flows out and flows back again! How near the portions of the Church in all parts of the world are brought! How much nearer to us for all practical purposes are our missionaries at the antipodes, than Paul at Rome to the Church at Jerusalem! The sound of their prayers, the echo of their songs of praise, seem to mingle with our own. Not here and there, or now and then, do the brethren seem to meet, but everywhere, all over the world, are they drawn together, nearer and still nearer. And as they thus approach each other; as they feel the bond of brotherhood enlarging yet not slackening; as they find their power of helping each other by word and deed still multiplying; as brave deeds and noble words are heard and seen almost as soon as done and spoken; as closer and closer seem to draw the ranks of the great army of the Lord, does it not seem as if it were gathering together for the coming of its King, as if the powers of good, as well as evil, too, were heading up for the last great conflict, and the soldiers of the Lord as they grasp firmer their weapons, and gird themselves for a sterner battle, knowing whose the victory

shall be, should they not look up and rejoice, because their redemption draweth nigh?

Surely, brethren, with these tokens of Christ's presence still amongst us, in spite of much that is discouraging, much that is threatening, there is good ground for hope for the future; hope, not of rest and ease for ourselves; hope, not of quiet times untroubled by strife or unvexed by heresy, these are not likely to come in our day; but hope for the triumph of God's truth over all its assailants, though the battle be fought with confused noise and garments rolled in blood; hope for the growing unity of Christian men, and it may be of Christian communities, driven together by assaults on Christian faith; hope for the overthrow of the strongholds of heathenism already shaken; hope for the reclaiming of the home heathen, the great mass of sin and ignorance bequeathed us by the neglect of past ages; hope —nay, rather assured certainty—that if our Church give herself to this work, if she rise to the greatness of her mission, if she go forth to her master's work in her master's Spirit, He will not forsake her, His presence will be with her still. And as we see the proofs of His presence still vouchsafed; as we see sinners converted and saints edified, as holy lives and happy deaths are still permitted to reward our toil, we, still waiting and working on to the glorious end, may possess our souls in patience and in faith. "There is a river, the streams whereof," still as of old, "make glad the city of God." The water of life, pure as crystal, flows still through all her streets; along its banks the good Shepherd still leads the flock who know His voice; and as we draw from that river the living water that alone can quench the fever thirst of human life—as we listen to the voice of its streams that bear along from all the ages of the past all sweet and holy sounds—as we think of its source high among the everlasting hills, hard by the throne of God and of the Lamb—the roaring voices of the wild waves of unbelief lose all their power to affright us, we "thank God and take courage."

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